



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW

OCTOBER, 1919

THE PRESIDENT AT HIS WORST

IT has been a patriotic pleasure, more than once or twice, in these pages to call attention to the President at his best. He has at times seemed so prescient in his statesmanship, so eloquent in his expression, and so sympathetic in his contact with and accurate in his interpretation of the mind and heart of the American people as to make commendation superfluous and exhortations of public support for his policies works of supererogation. The gratifying memory of such occasions makes it all the more unpleasant, yet none the less a duty, to regard him in his present extraordinary adventure, in mid-progress as these words are written, as being altogether at his worst.

We may pass by—though indeed it is the supreme consideration—the fact that he is at his worst in advocating a policy which is tantamount to betrayal of the independence and integrity of the United States and quite incompatible with those principles of nationality upon which this Republic was founded and upon which it has been developed to its present majestic proportions and beneficent might. That error is the greatest that any President of the United States has ever committed, or is likely ever to commit. But it was committed some time ago and is not peculiar to the current circumstances to which we have made reference.

In his performance of “swinging round the circle,” then, the President is at his worst in the very conception and purport of his tour. It was no light evil to renew his gross

neglect of official duty. He had already absented himself from his constitutional place of service for a number of months, during which time he had ignored some of the most pressing demands of national administration and had inflicted by default incalculable embarrassments and losses upon the country, beside incurring most ominous menaces—as he now himself confesses—for the future. Instead, however, of striving to atone at least in part for such disastrous nonfeasance, he sought the earliest possible pretext for resuming it, and at a time when every moment was big with crying needs of close attention to duty at the seat of government, he again for a period of weeks deserted his post.

Worse still, at a time when every patriotic motive and consideration demanded harmony, confidence and cooperation among all branches and members of the government and between them and the people, he deliberately set forth upon a mission of dissension, intent upon arousing class antagonisms and party animosities and upon undermining the nation's confidence in its own chosen lawmakers, and hoping to foment popular passions for the coercion of a coordinate branch of the government and for subversion of some of the most essential principles of the Constitution. Never before was so shameless and so mischievous an errand undertaken by a President of the United States.

There was, it is true, little cause for surprise. Months before the President had conducted in Europe a campaign of appeal to the people of those countries against their own governments. The astounding tolerance which permitted him to do this thing, which we can explain on only the ground of paralyzing stupefaction, naturally encouraged him to repeat the performance here, where he was at least free from danger of administrative interference. Yet we cannot admit that the successful performance of an evil act with impunity, excuses or palliates its repetition.

Having thus entered upon an indefensible undertaking, the President was and is at his worst in the manner of its execution. History records no other public utterances so unworthy as the diatribes which he has been copiously emitting wherever in his judgment they would do the most harm. They have no title to be considered as the addresses of a scholarly statesman intent upon informing the public upon weighty matters of national moment. They are reduced to the category of the shrill railings of a common

scold, substituting personal vituperation for the arguments which he could not convincingly command. For the President of the United States to go about the country shouting at the majority of the Senate of the United States in effect and in literal phrase, "Put up or shut up, you contemptible quitters, before you are hanged upon a gibbet!" is the most humiliating spectacle our political history records. Not even poor, passionate, uncultured President Johnson in his "swinging round the circle," ever descended to such depths of coarse abuse. We were accustomed to such language from Denis Kearney, in the Sand Lots days. Proceeding from a President of the United States distinguished for academic scholarship and urbane culture, it is astounding and revolting.

The President is at his worst, too, in the delusive vagueness and evasions of his utterances when he does assume to address himself to the great issues which are engaging the thought of the nation. For months the general principles had been discussed to repletion. There was nothing new to say about them. There was indeed no controversy concerning them; or if there was difference of opinion it was by common consent regarded as irremediable. But certain very specific, concrete questions had arisen, on which the people were not satisfied, and on which they earnestly desired precise information as to the President's meaning and as to his reasons for adopting the course he did. Such information would have been so welcome and so valuable that the giving of it would almost have excused the President for the needless manner in which he elected to give it. But he did not give it. He deliberately and with his unsurpassed dexterity evaded giving it. From all such matters he distracted attention by bringing forward all sorts of irrelevant and undisputed topics. Thus, to cite a single example, he sought to dispose of all the well-founded objections to our undertaking to protect all nations against external aggression, by dwelling elaborately and unctuously upon the impropriety and impossibility of our guaranteeing them against domestic revolution! Reduced to its ultimate elements, his argument amounted to this: That we must meddle in some way with the affairs of all nations, and since we cannot meddle in their domestic affairs we must do so with their external relations. Asked to explain something which needed explanation, he entered instead into elaborate and verbose ex-

planation of something which needed none. Complaining that in Washington the Senate involved the subject in mist, he proceeded himself to immerse it in a veritable London fog.

We all know his theory of Presidential functions, which he has not only publicly expressed but also diligently and pertinaciously endeavored to exemplify in his own administration of the office; and which is at direct variance with that of the Constitution and with the best practice of his predecessors. He has told us that the President is the sole official representative of the whole nation, and that he is required to make report to nobody but the nation at large; that he is not to be the mere Chief Executive, but is to be the general initiator and director of policies of government, so that instead of his executing the laws which Congress enacts, Congress will enact the laws which he prescribes. We cannot agree with that theory, and we are confident that the American nation does not. But even if it were the correct theory, and if such was the proper place of the President in our governmental system, we should doubt if it were possible for anyone to show himself more thoroughly unsuited to fill such a place than President Wilson has done and is doing in this amazing exhibition of himself at his worst.

OUR OWN RACE WAR

A MORDANT reflection upon the zeal of some Americans to implicate this country in all the racial and other conflicts which may arise in Europe appears in the circumstance of record that at the very time when they were seeking that end the United States was itself suffering a race war of its own, of most exacerbated character and ominous proportions. If the disturbances, riots and loss of life, often under the most atrocious circumstances, which have recently occurred at Chicago, Washington, Knoxville, St. Louis, Memphis, Birmingham and elsewhere, had occurred in some minor European country, and had involved some minority racial or religious element, there would have been in this country vociferous and impassioned protests, demands for intervention, denunciations of the country in question as incapable of decent government, and solemn preachments upon the necessity of our tying ourselves hand and foot in a League of Nations in order to put a stop to